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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MINSK WEEKLY POL/ECON REPORT - DECEMBER 22, 2006

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Ukrainian border on their way to Gomel from Chernihiv, where they attended a founding convention for Belarusian left-wing parties' union. Belarusian customs officers had them get off the train citing a need to look more closely at the activists' printed materials. The activists boarded a Minsk-bound train roughly two hours later.

16. Oppositin Activists Detained in Gomel

On December 18, independent media reported that authorities detain Belarusian Party of Communists members Valery Rybhenko and Viktor Balenkov in Gomel as they traveled to Rechitsa with copies of pro-opposition newspapers "Tovarishch" and "Narodnaya Volya," published in Russia, and a booklet by prominent Belarusian sociologist Oleg Manayev. Police claimed to have received a tip-off that the men were carrying dangerous goods in the car. Authorities held Rybhenko and Balenkov for more than an hour before releasing them without charges.

17. Ammunition "discovered" During Opposition Search

On December 18, police and BKGB officers in Baranovichi, Brest region, searched the apartment of opposition activist and the leader of the local organization of the Francis Skaryna Belarusian Language Society, Viktor Syritsa in connection with a handbag theft. Instead of the purse, authorities allegedly discovered 20 rounds of ammunition in the linen closet. Authorities held Syritsa at the police department for an hour and he may now face a charge of illegal possession of ammunition. Baranovichi State University's Economy and Law Vocational School dismissed Syritsa from his post as a history teacher this spring after he arranged a meeting between students and presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich.

18. Youths Demonstrate Solidarity With Kozulin

On the night of December 16, several dozen opposition youths lit candles in front of the house of imprisoned former presidential candidate Aleksander Kozulin in Minsk to display solidarity with the imprisoned politician and his family. Approximately a dozen more activists formed a line in front of the National Library in eastern Minsk, holding lighted candles as well. Police did not interfere with either event.

19. Minsk City Court Upholds Dashkevich's Sentence

On December 15, the Minsk City Court upheld the prison sentence against opposition youth leader Dmitry (Zmitser) Dashkevich who

was found guilty of running an unregistered organization (Malady Front) and sentenced to 18 months in November. According to independent media approximately a dozen youth attempted to demonstrate near the Minsk City Court during the trial displaying Dashkevich's images and chanting `Shame on you!' The protest was quickly broken up, but no arrests were reported.

¶10. Former Jewish Ghetto to Become Holocaust Memorial

On December 18, the director of a local history museum in Novogrudok, Grodno region, Tamara Vershitskaya, told independent media that she expects a Holocaust memorial to be built at the site of a former Jewish ghetto. The plans are to reconstruct two barrack rooms as well as workshops where the ghetto's prisoners worked during the Nazi occupation.

¶11. Workers to Stand Trial Over Death of Chickens

On December 18, independent media reported that the regional prosecutor's office was taking two poultry plant workers in the Gomel region to trial for giving the wrong feed to broiler chickens. The workers are being charged with neglect of duty as more than 90,000 birds died of heart failure this past August costing the company approximately USD 235,000. The accused could be required to compensate the plant for the damage.

¶12. Three Opposition Parties Form Union

On December 17, independent media reported that the leaders of three opposition left-wing parties, the Belarusian Party of Communists, the Belarusian Women's Party "Nadzeya" and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Gramada," signed an agreement formalizing the establishment of a union at a convention in Ukraine. Although many had trouble crossing the border, convention organizers reported that at least 500 delegates were able to attend the convention

¶13. Opposition Activist Sivchik's Brother Arrested

On December 19, authorities arrested Konstantin Lukashov, Vyacheslav Sivchik's half-brother in connection with the prominent opposition activist's arrest escape this past March. Sivchik told independent media that his brother is accused of

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